DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/ELF Termination

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1999 . . . S. 2057. Feingold amendment No. 2808.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 20-72

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 2057, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1999, will authorize \$270.6 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (this amount is equal to the requested level, and is in accordance with the budget agreement of last year). In real terms, spending will be \$2.9 billion less than last year. As a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), defense spending will be just 3.1 percent, which will be the lowest level of defense spending since 1940. Defense spending has declined steadily since 1986, when it was 6.5 percent of GDP.

The Feingold amendment would require the Navy to terminate the Extremely Low Frequency (ELF) Communication System program. Funds made available to the program after the date of enactment of this Act would be used only to pay termination costs. Any remaining, unused funds for the program would be given to the Army National Guard and to the Air National Guard. (The ELF program is used to send signals to ballistic missile and attack submarines that are submerged and operating at high speeds.)

Those favoring the amendment contended:

The ELF program is a Cold War anachronism that poses health risks to the people of Wisconsin. Under this program, two huge antennas, stretching more than 28 miles, are used to send extremely low frequency signals to submarines that are operating in deep water and traveling at high speeds. The program is not the model of efficiency--it takes up to 15 minutes just to transmit 3 letters accurately. The communications are one-way--basically, they are used to order submarines to come up to the surface to get more detailed instructions. The purpose of having the program during the Cold War was to make it possible to get messages to submarines quickly when they were operating in deep water and moving rapidly to avoid Soviet detection. We think that the purpose was always dubious at best, but now that the Soviet Union no longer exists the purpose no longer exists. Nevertheless, we continue to spend

(See other side)

YEAS (20)		NAYS (72)			NOT VOTING (8)	
Republicans	Democrats (20 or 50%)	Republicans (52 or 100%)		Democrats (20 or 50%)	Republicans	Democrats (5)
(0 or 0%)					(3)	
	Biden Boxer Bryan Bumpers Byrd Daschle Durbin Feingold Harkin Johnson Kennedy Kohl Lautenberg Leahy Levin Mikulski Moseley-Braun Reid Sarbanes Wellstone	Abraham Allard Ashcroft Bennett Bond Brownback Burns Campbell Chafee Coats Cochran Collins Coverdell Craig D'Amato DeWine Domenici Enzi Faircloth Frist Gorton Gramm Grams Grams Grassley Gregg Hagel	Hatch Helms Hutchison Inhofe Jeffords Kempthorne Kyl Lott Lugar Mack McCain McConnell Murkowski Nickles Roberts Santorum Sessions Shelby Smith, Bob Smith, Gordon Snowe Stevens Thomas Thompson Thurmond Warner	Bingaman Breaux Cleland Conrad Dodd Dorgan Feinstein Ford Graham Hollings Inouye Kerrey Kerry Landrieu Lieberman Moynihan Murray Reed Robb Torricelli	1—Offic 2—Nece 3—Illnes 4—Other SYMBOI AY—An	LS: nounced Yea nounced Nay red Yea

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\$12 million per year to maintain the ELF system. This system may do more than waste money, however. The electromagnetic radiation from the antennas in Wisconsin may cause cancer. Some studies have been inconclusive, but more than 40 studies have shown a link. The citizens of Wisconsin do not want these large antennas, which serve no valid military purpose. The Feingold amendment would consequently terminate the program, and would spend the savings on the National Guard, which sorely needs additional funding. We urge our colleagues to support this sensible amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

As long as the United States maintains a submarine force, it is going to need a way to get messages to its submarines when they are operating at high speeds and at great depths. Currently, the only such communications system the United States has is the ELF system. A new system could conceivably be built, but the cost would be much greater than the minimal \$12 million annual cost of maintaining the current system. Without the ELF system, our submarines would be forced to operate at or near the surface, and move at slower speeds, because otherwise it would be impossible to get messages to them should an immediate need arise. The value of a submarine is precisely its ability to avoid detection; if the United States' submarines were forced to operate at slow speeds close to the surface or on the surface, they would be much easier to detect. In essence, the Feingold amendment would force us to operate submarines like surface ships, and would thus totally destroy the value of having submarines. The vast majority of our colleagues understand the numerous strategic and conventional reasons why the United States should maintain a submarine fleet, and they are willing to vote for hundreds of millions of dollars to maintain one. We trust, therefore, that they will not neuter that fleet by killing the ELF program.

We believe that the main reason our colleagues have proposed this amendment is in response to the fears of the citizens of Wisconsin, who have been led to believe by some researchers that the electromagnetic waves from the ELF antennas cause cancer. After those concerns were first raised, though, the Navy began to study the issue. It hired an independent organization to conduct ongoing environmental monitoring near the antennas. Over the years, that monitoring has not found any adverse effect on animals, plants, or micro-organisms. Further, in 1996, the National Academy of Science (NAS) completed an exhaustive review of more than 500 studies spanning 17 years of research on the health effects of electromagnetic fields, and found no conclusive evidence that those fields cause cancer, reproductive or developmental abnormalities, or learning or behavioral problems. Scientists who are more interested in notoriety than valid science still like to scare people into thinking that the antennas pose a health risk, but the evidence simply does not exist. For our part, we are not willing to degrade the United States' military capabilities to alleviate unwarranted fears. We therefore strongly oppose the Feingold amendment.